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THE DANISH FOLK LORE SOCIETY

"Danmarks Folkeminder" (Danish Folk Lore) is a society founded March 20th, 1908 in Denmark by Professor Axel Olrik, who was its president and leader until his death in 1917. Its object, according to a pamphlet issued by the Society, is "to gather those recollections of old Danish peasant life which still live on the lips of the people, and in a simple, clear way to throw light upon the life, the beliefs and the song and legend of the Danish peasantry past and present." The Society's president is Dr. Henrik Ussing (Molbechshus, Sorø, Denmark). Mr. P. K. Toksvig of New York City is the Society's American representative.

"While sources to a knowledge of the past are rich and full concerning such men as rank high in political and social life," continues the pamphlet, "it is quite another matter when it comes to the plain citizen in olden days, his views of life, his songs and stories, his week days and feast days."

"We have a fairly good and complete picture of the material side of peasant culture through visible and physical objects from the past, and through pictures and historical description. But that side of the life of the people, which unfolds itself in the spoken word, in manners and customs, in thoughts and beliefs, in expressions of joy or sorrow or reflections over the ways of life, has almost down to our time been suppressed, held in contempt or overlooked by those whose task it was to recall the past by means of the pen."

"To remedy this lack of knowledge and understanding, "Danmarks Folkeminder" is continuing the work of similar efforts of the last century: Sven Grundtvig's, H. F. Feilberg's and Evald Tang Kristensen's Collections of Folk Lore. It seeks in close co-operation with the Danish Folk Lore department of the Royal Library to cover as many sides of old time peasant life as possible, and seeks to paint as manysided and as richly nuanced a description thereof as can be done in our time. This will help us to understand many phases of the modern, everyday citizen's life which has an intimate connection with

the life of the past. We shall, thereby, gain an insight into the truest spirit of the Danish nation, and appreciate those changing conditions of culture to which each particular age owes its stamp, as well as the innermost nature and character of our people. We seek, too, to perpetuate and save such song and legend as is formed or created by unknown men of the people. Sung or written, perhaps, in long times past but which by their charm or humor or by their noble structure will be as pearls for all time among the intellectual treasures of our people."

"The Society seeks to realize its object in the following manner:

"1. That its members write down or narrate whatever lies within the range of their popular heritage; such as songs and fairy tales, myth and superstition, proverbs and games, every day life and feast days, etc. Material collected in this way, will be kept as a part of the collection of Danish folk lore in the Royal Library, as the property of the Danish people."

"2. By publishing selections of the collected material in pamphlet form together with simple scientific accounts explaining Danish folk lore and Danish folk customs and manners."

"3. By calling attention to our folk lore through newspapers and periodicals, and by suggesting the best method for collecting such material."

"However, in order to realize this object as fully as possible, it is necessary that membership in the Society and support of its work be as extensive and strong as possible. We, therefore, venture to urge you to become a member of "Danmarks Folkeminder." The membership fee is \$1.50 a year, including free copies of all publications issued by the Society during the course of the year."

Until recently, efforts to collect material in the field of Danish folk lore have been confined almost entirely to Denmark. But have not Danes in America something to contribute? I think they have. Perhaps, even the most interesting part. Many older men and women in this country who have lived their childhood and youth (or at least a part of it) in Denmark

have, as a rule, cherished memories of these years with a faithfulness and accuracy which in every way equals, if not surpasses, the recollections of people who have never been outside of Denmark.

To write down these memoirs, will be an attractive task for many older Danes in America. Those who have gone through the hard school of the pioneer days will have something to talk about, which will be read in the homeland as something interesting and full of glamour. A 76 year-old Danish man in Minnesota has sent me many fascinating accounts of his life as a Danish dragoon in the war with Germany in 1864. I am, furthermore, expecting from him a description of his adventures as a pioneer farmer in the great American Northwest. These collected memoirs will make attractive reading for every Danish man or woman who has a heart for the progress of the Danish people either at home or abroad.

But not only older folks can co-operate in bringing about such a collection of folk lore. Young people can likewise help by writing down stories told them by older persons who prefer to narrate instead of writing themselves. Very often men who possess remarkable descriptive powers, so far as oral description is concerned, lose their inspiration when they try to pen the tale on paper. Here is where the youthful folk lore enthusiast can step in and render valuable service. In this way fables, myths, old ballads, fairy tales, puzzles, proverbs, etc., can be collected and submitted.

At present, there are only six members of the Society in the United States and Canada. This membership could grow to 600 in a surprisingly short time, if every person who has a heart and interest in this cause, would join the Society after reading this article. Applications for membership may be sent to the president, Dr. Ussing, in Denmark or until further notice, to my daughter, Gudrun Toksvig, Girls' Community Club, 86 Macdougall St., New York City. After May 25th, I shall be glad to answer any personal communication or query in regard to the work or scope of the Society at my home, Svanemosegaardsvej 11², Copenhagen V., Denmark.

P. K. TOKSVIG

April, 1921